

The Exegetical Traditions of ʿĀʾisha: Notes on their Impact and Significance*

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In the chapter devoted to the exegesis of the Qur'an in Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 42 of the 457 traditions cited are credited to ʿĀʾisha bint Abī Bakr (d. 58/678).¹ Bukhārī (d. 250/870) applies these 42 traditions to some 63 Qur'anic verses pertaining to a wide range of topics. These traditions are also often cited in medieval Sunnī exegeses of these verses. However, most secondary sources provide little indication as to how this apparent evidence that an early Muslim woman was seen as an exegetical authority might be understood in relation to the development of early and medieval Qur'anic exegesis. In modern works, ʿĀʾisha tends to be studied primarily with reference to the Qur'anic verses traditionally read (by Sunnīs) as alluding to her, while the exegetical traditions traced back to her have received comparatively little detailed consideration.

This article attempts to contribute to the discussion of the complex questions surrounding the exegetical material traced back to ʿĀʾisha by examining six traditions from Bukhārī's chapter on exegesis, each of which depict her role in ways that go beyond simple transmission. It will be argued that Bukhārī depicts ʿĀʾisha as an exegetical authority, and that medieval Sunnī Qur'an-interpreters generally recognise traditions credited to her as authoritative, although the degree to which they do so varies for a number of reasons. These texts will be studied as portrayals of ʿĀʾisha's exegetical activity; however, the question of the authenticity of these individual texts is beyond the scope of this study.²

Three of the texts relate to fundamental issues of Muslim belief, and the remaining three discuss aspects of Hajj. These particular traditions have been selected because their relation to topics of central concern to Sunnī 'orthodox' belief and public worship makes them particularly relevant to questions of interpretive authority. The texts will be considered in terms of the three main ways in which they portray ʿĀʾisha's exegetical activity: as a transmitter and 'active interlocutor'³ of the Prophet's words; as an exegete; and as a participant in exegetical debates.

Characterising Traditions Credited to ʿĀʾisha

A number of Qur'anic verses are traditionally associated with ʿĀʾisha's life, most notably a passage referring to an accusation of adultery made against an unnamed Muslim woman (Q. 24:11–20), and a section referring to conflict within the Prophet's

household (Q. 66:1–5). Some of the exegetical traditions regarding such verses are credited to her.⁴ Medieval exegetes used such verses and exegetical traditions to construct an ideal model of life for all Muslim women based on 'quiet domesticity; modest comportment, indeed, invisibility through veiling ... wifely obedience'.⁵ Therefore, the body of traditions traced back to 'Ā'isha tends to be characterised as mainly concerned with gender relations and/or domestic affairs. Although the existence of reports credited to her about theological topics⁶ and rituals such as prayer and pilgrimage⁷ has been recognised, contemporary attention tends to be focused on how the gender-related or domestic texts have been used to prevent women from participating in public life.⁸

Traditions credited to 'Ā'isha tend therefore to be seen as aspects of her idealisation as a dutiful wife,⁹ and this focuses attention on the instrumental aspects of transmission as 'a process which depends upon proximity and memory'¹⁰ as opposed to focusing on the exegetical process per se. In such a reading of exegetical reports traced back to 'Ā'isha, the portrayal is perceived to be that of a woman playing an essentially instrumental role by virtue of her status as wife of the Prophet. This implies that, although reports traced back to her were used by classical scholars to interpret the Qur'an, 'Ā'isha herself is not being depicted as an exegete.

However, Leila Ahmed highlights aspects of subjectivity and agency present in depictions of early Muslim women transmitting traditions. She points out that they 'comment forthrightly on ... even the Qur'an', and question Muḥammad, who 'readily responded to their comments'. She also remarks that for medieval scholars '[t]o accept women's testimony on the words and deeds of the Prophet was to accept their authority on matters intended to have a prescriptive, regulatory relation to mores and laws'.¹¹ Such an approach to exegetical traditions makes it possible to ask whether 'Ā'isha is in fact portrayed in these *ḥadīth*-texts as an exegete.¹²

While contemporary studies of prominent women within religious groups often differentiate between those women who achieve status in their own right, and those who have status as a result of their connection to powerful or holy men (with the wives of the Prophet cited as examples of the latter),¹³ this distinction may be misleading when analysing the dynamics of authority in Bukhārī's portrayal of 'Ā'isha as a transmitter, as Bukhārī portrays some prominent male companions both as exegetical authorities and as enjoying proximity to Muḥammad.¹⁴

For example, Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687) is a major source of exegetical material for Bukhārī and, according to him, was highly esteemed as an interpreter of the Qur'an by none other than the second rightly-guided caliph, 'Umar (r. 13/634–24/644).¹⁵ Yet as a cousin of the Prophet and nephew of Muḥammad's wife, Maymūna bint al-Ḥārith, Ibn 'Abbās visits the Prophet often and stays the night with him, thus

observing his night prayers;¹⁶ similarly, Ibn Masʿūd is reported to have frequently visited the Prophet and to have served him to the extent that he was known as ‘the carrier of the [Prophet’s] shoes, toothbrush and ablution-jar’.¹⁷ Such proximity is not only often equated with greater opportunities to learn the Qurʾan from the Prophet himself, but is also regarded as a reflection of that person’s worthiness in the eyes of God,¹⁸ and is therefore an important element of their portrayal as exegetical authorities.

As these portrayals of proximity indicate, characterising Bukhārī’s portrayal of ʿĀʾisha in the exegetical traditions which he traces back to her is a complex matter. It is necessary to take a close look at the approaches to transmission depicted in these texts in order to be able to assess the degree to which ʿĀʾisha is being presented as exercising exegetical authority.

ʿĀʾisha as a Transmitter and Active Interlocutor

The following traditions are presented in a statement–question–answer form: Muḥammad makes a statement, ʿĀʾisha questions him about it, and he replies.

a) The Reckoning of the Day of Judgement

ʿĀʾisha narrated: ‘The Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) said, “There is none whose account will be questioned who will not perish”.’ She said, ‘I asked, “Messenger of God, may God make me your ransom. Does God, the Glorious, the Exalted, not say, *Then whoever is given his account in his right hand, he truly will receive an easy reckoning?* [Q. 84:7–8]” He replied, “That is the presentation [of accounts], but the one whose record is questioned will perish”.’¹⁹

The variant of this tradition cited by Bukhārī in his chapter on learning, in the sub-chapter entitled ‘One who heard something and asked until he understood it’, is prefaced by the comment of the sub-narrator that it was the practice of ʿĀʾisha to repeatedly inquire about anything that she had heard but did not understand, until she had grasped it fully.²⁰ Thus Bukhārī presents this type of transmission as exemplary as well as thoroughly reliable. A number of the other traditions he relates from ʿĀʾisha on the subject of the Day of Judgement are also presented in this form.²¹

Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) recounts eight variants of ʿĀʾisha’s tradition;²² Qurṭubī (d. 656/1258) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372) both quote her tradition and accept it as the correct interpretation of the verse; as does Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).²³ Some versions relate that she heard the Prophet praying that he would be granted an easy reckoning, and later asked him what he had meant,²⁴ which could point to an attempt to down-

play 'Ā'isha's role as interlocutor in the text. However, other variants present 'Ā'isha's exegesis on her own authority: one tradition has her say that the verse means that 'He [God] will be aware of his [the believer's] sins; then He will pass them over'. In another, she states, 'Whoever is brought to account on the Day of Judgement will enter Paradise', and then recites not only Q. 84:7, but also Q. 55:41: *The guilty will be known by their marks ...*²⁵ These variants indicate that the tradition probably circulated fairly widely. They also make more evident a dynamic of interpretative authority within the text: that 'Ā'isha's authority to interpret verses Q. 84:7–8 was based to some extent on her reported knowledge of the Qur'an as well as her transmission of Muḥammad's explanation, even in the version of the tradition cited in Bukhārī's exegetical chapter.

b) The Form of the Ka'ba

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar narrated from 'Ā'isha (may Almighty God be pleased with her), wife of the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace), that the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) said: 'Do you not see that when your people rebuilt the Ka'ba, they did not build it on Abraham's foundations, but made it smaller?' I ['Ā'isha] asked: 'Messenger of God, why don't you rebuild it on Abraham's foundations?' He answered: 'If your people had not so recently left disbelief [I would do so]'. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar said: 'Ā'isha heard this from the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace). I do not think that the Messenger of God would have avoided touching the two corners of the Ka'ba facing the *hijr* except for the reason that it was not built on Abraham's foundations'.²⁶

This is the only tradition cited by Bukhārī in explanation of Q. 2:127: *And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House ...* Elsewhere, Bukhārī also cites variants of this text that seem to express a critical view of anti-egalitarian aspects of pre-Islamic Meccan ritual practice. In one version, 'Ā'isha asks why the door had been placed so high, and Muḥammad answers:

'Your people did that so that they could allow whomever they wanted to enter [the Ka'ba] and prevent whomever they wanted. If your people were not [so] recently [out] of the era of ignorance ... I would make its door touch the ground.'²⁷

Other versions mention a feature that would have made it even more accessible to those wishing to enter it: the construction of two doors, in order to allow people to enter through one and exit through the other.²⁸ The Qur'an states that the Ka'ba was built by Abraham in response to God's command (Q. 2:125–7); it is central to the

Hajj, and Muslims face the direction of the Kaʿba when performing daily prayers in order to symbolically affirm belief in the unity of God and the continuity of Islam with the messages of previous prophets (Q. 2:142–50). ʿĀʾisha’s tradition could therefore be read as threatening to this symbolic structure. As will become clear, it could also be regarded as politically explosive.

Classical exegesis of Q. 2:127 is generally focused on affirming the centrality of the Kaʿba in human history and in the cosmos. Thus Ṭabarī discusses the question of who originally built the Kaʿba and cites traditions that give different answers: according to some Adam built it, or it came to earth with him when he was ejected from paradise; another opinion is that the Kaʿba existed before the world began.²⁹ (Qurtūbī, Ibn Kathīr and Suyūṭī relate similar traditions.)³⁰ This cosmic Kaʿba symbolises the throne of God encircled by angels and is a concrete representation of prophecy; therefore, the world is inconceivable without it. Texts also assert the primacy of Mecca over Jerusalem: Suyūṭī relates that while Jerusalem has the graves of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Mecca contains the graves of seventy prophets.³¹

The fact that ʿĀʾisha’s tradition does not fit comfortably into the vision of a cosmic Kaʿba might partly explain why Ṭabarī and a number of other exegetes omit it.³² Moreover, those exegetes who do mention ʿĀʾisha’s tradition state that when the Kaʿba was severely damaged by the Umayyad army during the uprising of ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73/692), this *ḥadīth* inspired him to destroy what was left of its walls and rebuild it, extending it to include the *ḥijr*, and making an additional door, an act which aroused significant opposition: Ibn ʿAbbās expressed his opposition to the renovations and the people of Mecca left the city for three days, fearing the descent of God’s wrath.³³ Then, when the Umayyad army had defeated Ibn al-Zubayr, their general wrote to the caliph and informed him that the Kaʿba had been rebuilt, and the caliph ordered him to ensure that the Kaʿba was returned to its previous form. Both Qurtūbī and Ibn Kathīr also relate, however, that the caliph later inquired about the authenticity of ʿĀʾisha’s tradition, and stated that if he had known about it at the time he would not have reversed Ibn al-Zubayr’s renovations.³⁴ They then both go on to recount that, about a century later, the ʿAbbāsīd caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–94/786–809) told Imam Mālik that he wanted to restore the Kaʿba to the form outlined in ʿĀʾisha’s tradition, but Mālik objected to the idea, saying that treating the Kaʿba as ‘a plaything for rulers’ (*malʿaba liʾl-mulūk*) would cause people to cease to regard it as sacred. The renovations were not carried out.³⁵

That tension was perceived by some classical scholars between the imperative felt to be implied in ʿĀʾisha’s report and social realities is evident in Ibn Kathīr’s exegesis. While he notes that a number of scholars say the Kaʿba should be left as it is, he also asserts that ʿĀʾisha’s tradition is indisputably authentic. It is significant that neither

Ibn Kathīr nor Qurtubī try to neutralise the tradition by suggesting that ʿĀʾisha had misunderstood the Prophet. Nor do they use Ibn ʿUmar's corroboration as evidence for the saying's authenticity.³⁶

ʿĀʾisha as an Exegete

The next two traditions present ʿĀʾisha expressing an interpretation without any direct reference to the words of Muḥammad.

a) *Sūrat al-Najm* and the Prophet's Vision

Masrūq narrated: I said to ʿĀʾisha, 'O Mother, did Muḥammad (God bless him and grant him peace) see his Lord?' She said, 'What you have said makes my hair stand on end! Be aware that whoever tells you any of the following three things has certainly lied:

'Whoever tells you that Muḥammad (God bless him and grant him peace) saw his Lord has certainly lied.' Then she recited, *Vision does not comprehend Him, but He comprehends (all) vision. He is the Kind, the Aware* [Q. 6:103] and *It is not given to any mortal that God should speak to him unless by revelation or from behind a veil ...* [Q. 42:51].

'Whoever tells you that he knows what will happen tomorrow has certainly lied.' Then she recited, *No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow ...* [Q. 31:34].

'And whoever tells you that he concealed [any of God's message] has certainly lied.' Then she recited, *O Messenger! Make known what has been revealed to you from your Lord ...* [Q. 5:67].

'However,' [she added], 'He saw Gabriel (peace be upon him) in his [angelic] form twice.'³⁷

This tradition relates one interpretation of the opening verses of *Sūrat al-Najm*. As is well known, the question of whether believers would have the beatific vision in paradise was a matter of theological controversy in the early centuries of Islam, with the Muʿtazilites asserting that it is not possible for human eyes to see God. In this tradition therefore, Bukhārī is presenting ʿĀʾisha discussing a matter of great concern to theologians of his time.

All sides of the debate are reflected in traditions credited to various contemporaries of Muḥammad: while it is reported that Ibn Masʿūd, like ʿĀʾisha, also maintained that these verses refer to the Prophet's vision of Gabriel, a range of views are ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās and one interpretation of the verse *The heart lied not in what it saw* [Q. 53:11] attributed to him is that it alludes to Muḥammad's vision of God.³⁸

Ṭabarī discusses the different interpretations of the opening verses of *Sūrat al-Najm*, citing traditions which relate that verse eight, *Then he drew nigh and came down*, was interpreted by Ibn ʿAbbās and Anas ibn Mālik, another prominent companion, to mean that God descended and drew near to the Prophet. When a number of people asked the Prophet if he had seen God, he reportedly answered, 'I did not see Him with my eyes. I saw Him with my heart twice,' and then recited, *'Then he drew nigh and came down.'* The other interpretation, illustrated by a number of variants of ʿĀʾisha's tradition as well as traditions from Ibn Masʿūd and others, is that these verses refer to the Prophet's vision of Gabriel's angelic form. Thus, it was Gabriel, not God, who *drew nigh and came down*, and it was the vision of Gabriel that the Prophet's heart saw. And while Ibn ʿAbbās interprets verse ten, *And he revealed to his slave that which he revealed*, to mean that God communicated revelation directly to the Prophet, Ṭabarī approvingly quotes traditions indicating that the verse means that Gabriel revealed God's message to the Prophet. He also cites several variants of ʿĀʾisha's tradition that discuss verse thirteen, *he saw him yet another time*, in which she says, 'I was the first of this community to ask the Messenger of God about that.' On the question of whether the Prophet saw God, ʿĀʾisha emphatically declares, 'This is the worst falsehood against God' and supports her position by citing Q. 6:103 and Q. 42:51.³⁹

Some Ṣūfīs had their own readings of these verses and exegetical traditions. Hujwīrī, for instance, claims that while ʿĀʾisha was among the literalists (*ahl-e zāhir*), Ibn ʿAbbās had the capacity to understand the concept of seeing without the aid of physical eyes.⁴⁰ Therefore, the Prophet spoke to each of them 'according to their insight'. While he attributes a greater spiritual capacity to Ibn ʿAbbās, he does not say that the tradition credited to ʿĀʾisha is unreliable.

Not all shared this reticence. Ibn Kathīr indignantly refutes the claims that the Prophet spoke to ʿĀʾisha 'according to the level of her *ʿaql* [insight or intelligence]', or even that 'she changed what he had said'.⁴¹ Perhaps such claims help explain why exegetes such as Qurṭubī and Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), who largely agree with ʿĀʾisha's interpretation of the verses, conduct the entire discussion without mentioning her views. Some exegetes do, however, cite her tradition as supporting evidence.⁴²

b) Staying at ʿArafa

ʿĀʾisha, may God be pleased with her, said: 'The Quraysh and those who shared their religion used to stay at Muzdalifa. They were called Hums. The rest of the Arabs used to stay at ʿArafa. When Islam came, God instructed His Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) to go to ʿArafa, stay there, and then depart from there, as in the statement of the Most High: *Then hasten onward from the place where all the people hasten onward* [Q. 2:199].'⁴³

Bukhārī cites this tradition as an interpretation of Q. 2:199, along with one credited to Ibn ʿAbbās discussing the proper order of the rites of pilgrimage. As will become clear, this report relates to the transformation of the Hajj in early Islam from a ritual that was performed differently by various tribes to a rite that de-emphasises the social identity of the participants.⁴⁴

Ṭabarī observes that there is a difference of opinion about the identity of 'the people' mentioned in the verse, and cites sayings from ʿĀʾisha (and others, including Ibn ʿAbbās) indicating that the Quraysh believed that their status as dwellers of Mecca entitled them to remain within the city limits during the Hajj, so they performed the rite of *wuqūf* ('staying') at Muzdalifa, while other Arabs performed this ritual at ʿArafa. Therefore, most agree that 'the people' whose practice the Quraysh are instructed to follow are the other Arab tribes.⁴⁵ Ibn Kathīr meanwhile explains that it is obligatory for all pilgrims to stand at ʿArafa, and quotes ʿĀʾisha's tradition as evidence of this. He notes that Ibn ʿAbbās and early exegetical authorities have made similar statements, and quotes reports from a man about seeing the Prophet standing at ʿArafa.⁴⁶ Suyūṭī, in turn, observes that many authorities have related ʿĀʾisha's tradition. He cites several versions of it, including one that emphasises that the Quraysh explained their staying at Muzdalifa by pointing to their status as 'neighbours of the House [of God]', and quotes traditions credited to Ibn ʿAbbās and others, including the companion Asmāʾ bint Abī Bakr, which agree with ʿĀʾisha's tradition. No dissenting views are cited.⁴⁷ Apparently, the exegesis traced back to ʿĀʾisha of Q. 2:199 was in accord with its generally accepted interpretation.

ʿĀʾisha as a Participant in Exegetical Debates

Both of the following traditions are structured around the motif of interpretive debate.

a) Prophets and Doubt

Ibn Abī Mulayka narrated: 'Ibn ʿAbbās (may God be pleased with them both)⁴⁸ recited, *Till, when the Messengers despaired and thought that they were misled (kudhibū), then Our help came to them ...* [Q. 12:110]. Then he recited, ... *Until the Messenger [of God] and those who believed along with him said: When will God's help come? Certainly, God's help is near* [Q. 2:214].'

[When] I met ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr and told him this, he said: 'ʿĀʾisha said [regarding this], "God forbid! By God, whatever God promised to His Messenger, he knew that it would certainly happen before he died. But tribulations did not cease to afflict the prophets, until they feared that those with them would accuse them of lying". She used to recite it [as]: ... *Till they thought that they were being denied (kudhdhibū)*.'⁴⁹

This tradition, and two other variants cited by Bukhārī,⁵⁰ depict ʿĀʾisha taking part in the theological controversies of the early Muslim community, and suggest that some companions considered her interpretation and recitation more authoritative than those of Ibn ʿAbbās. It is moreover significant that Bukhārī credits ʿĀʾisha with variant readings, as well as with having her own copy of the Qurʾan, as many of the companions who are said to have had their own copies are also presented in various traditions as exegetical authorities.⁵¹ It is noteworthy that Bukhārī relates a tradition in which a man comes from Iraq asking ʿĀʾisha if he could see her copy of the Qurʾan so that he might arrange the suras in the order in which they appeared in hers, for, he explains to her, the suras are being recited in no fixed order.⁵² The scope of this unnamed Iraqi's quest is unclear – is he challenging the order of suras in the copy of one of the companions living in Iraq, or is he simply arranging the suras in his own codex? What is clear, however, is that this tradition appears to be alluding to other reports about the differing orders of suras in the copies of various senior male companions,⁵³ and presents ʿĀʾisha as a textual authority on a par with them.

In the general reading of this verse, the Arabic term *kudhibū* means 'they were lied about', but it can also mean 'they were deceived or deluded'. The above tradition implies that Ibn ʿAbbās understood the word in the latter sense. However, the reading credited to ʿĀʾisha, *kudhhibū*, means 'they were called liars, or disbelieved'. This latter reading expresses what became the 'orthodox' understanding of this verse, and appears to have been intended to counter the possibility of interpreting the verse as Ibn ʿAbbās is here said to have done. However, as will be seen below, other traditions credit him with the 'orthodox' view.

Although ʿĀʾisha's reported involvement with textual variants has been dismissed by some as marginal,⁵⁴ it is evident that the issue being addressed by the variant reading of Q. 12:110 traced back to her was important to the early community, and also to many classical exegetes. This concern is quite evident in medieval exegetical works. Ṭabarī begins his exegesis by stating that most scholars agree that the verse means that when God sent prophets, people rejected their message. Then, when the prophets gave up hope that people would believe in them, and the people came to the conclusion that the prophets had deceived them, God's help came. A number of the traditions cited in support of this widely accepted interpretation are attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās and one of his students, Saʿīd ibn Jubayr. Ṭabarī notes that a number of authorities, including some Qurʾan-reciters from Medina and most from Kūfa, read *kudhibū*, and approves of this reading. However, he notes that some authorities interpret the verse to mean that the prophets gave up hope that their peoples would believe, and also thought that God's promise of victory would not be fulfilled, and relates a number of reports credited to Ibn ʿAbbās to illustrate this. According to reports from his students, when Ibn ʿAbbās was questioned about his interpretation, he replied that

the prophets were human beings. However Ṭabarī rejects this interpretation on the grounds that it contradicts what is known about the characteristics (*ṣifāt*) of the prophets, and states that 'The view we mentioned, the better one, which we [previously] related from Ibn ʿAbbās, is from ʿĀʾisha ...' He then cites several versions of her tradition. Ṭabarī also discusses the recitation of this verse traced back to ʿĀʾisha, and notes that the Iraqi successors Qatāda and Ḥasan, as well as most of the Qur'an-reciters of Medina, Baṣra and Syria, read it the same way. Not all of them shared her interpretation, however: Qatāda's explanation for his reading was that the prophets were sure that their people were not going to accept their message.⁵⁵

The interpretation and recitation of Q. 12:110 traced back to ʿĀʾisha also influenced later classical exegeses. Qurtubī mentions the interpretation credited to her, and rejects that ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās.⁵⁶ Variants of the tradition amplify ʿUrwa's questions and ʿĀʾisha's answers.⁵⁷ Different views are attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās and his students, ranging from an interpretation virtually the same as ʿĀʾisha's to one pointing to the story of Jonah as an example of how prophets can doubt.⁵⁸ Suyūṭī relates a report from a student of ʿĀʾisha's, saying that she defended her reading by tracing it back to the Prophet; however, two of her students, Qāsim⁵⁹ and ʿAmra bint ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, relate that her recitation was *kudhibū* which, as Ibn Kathīr comments, does not agree with her exegesis of the verse.⁶⁰

b) Going Between Ṣafā and Marwa [ṣaʿy]

[ʿUrwa] said: When I was young, I once said to ʿĀʾisha, wife of the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace), 'How do you interpret the statement of God, blessed and exalted is He – *Ṣafā and Marwa are among the signs of God. It is therefore no sin for him who is on pilgrimage to the House [of God] or visiting it, to go between them ...* [Q. 2:158]. I see no harm in not going between them.' ʿĀʾisha said: 'On the contrary! If it is as you say, (the verse) would be: ... *it is therefore no sin for him if he does not go between them ...* This verse was revealed about the *anṣār*. They used to visit [the image of] Manāt, which was near Qudayd, and they considered it forbidden to go between Ṣafā and Marwa. After they had become Muslims, they asked the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) about this [rite] and God revealed: *Ṣafā and Marwa are among the signs of God ...* [Q. 2:158].'⁶¹

This complex narration presents ʿUrwa asking ʿĀʾisha her interpretation of a Qur'anic verse. Her response is based on her linguistic understanding of the verse, as well as her knowledge of the circumstances of its revelation. In explanation of this verse, Bukhārī also cites a report from Anas that in the pre-Islamic period the people

of Medina used to do *saʿy*, but when they became Muslims they stopped doing so because they considered it a pre-Islamic rite. Q. 2:158 was then revealed in order to indicate that this rite could be performed.⁶² Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) cites versions of the traditions of ʿĀʾisha and Anas in his chapter on exegesis, and his variant of the latter's report concludes that *saʿy* is voluntary.⁶³ Bukhārī also relates contradictory traditions attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās on this issue: one has him declare that *saʿy* is not Sunna,⁶⁴ but rather a pre-Islamic Arabian custom, while another relates that he explained that it is performed in order to commemorate the running of Hagar between the two hills in search of water.⁶⁵

From these reports, it is evident that the origin and status of the rite were disputed in the early period of Islam. The controversy was apparently caused by differing interpretations of the statement *it is therefore no sin for him* [Q. 2:158].⁶⁶ However, requiring all pilgrims to do *saʿy* asserted their equality as worshippers of a common deity while de-emphasising tribal distinctions. As the tradition on the standing at ʿArafa indicates, there were differences in the ways in which various tribes performed the pilgrimage in pre-Islamic times, which at least in that case reportedly implied a claim to pre-eminence. In view of this, it is perhaps not surprising that there appears to have been some resistance to attempts to standardise pilgrimage rituals.⁶⁷

The emphasis of classical exegetes is on the legal implications of the verse. While it was apparently widely agreed that the Prophet had performed *saʿy*, authorities differed about its legal status. Anas, Ibn ʿAbbās and the latter's students, the successors ʿAṭā and Mujāhid, are reported to have considered it voluntary.⁶⁸ Ibn ʿAbbās and Ibn Masʿūd are related to have recited the relevant passage as: *it is therefore no sin for him if he does not go between them*.⁶⁹ However, the opinion that *saʿy* is obligatory is also credited to Ibn ʿAbbās.⁷⁰ Ṭabarī cites the tradition traced back to ʿĀʾisha quoted above, as well as an emphatic saying credited to her, 'The Prophet established going between them and it is not for anyone to leave going between them,' which is also related by several other exegetes.⁷¹ He notes that the jurists Mālik⁷² and Shāfiʿī are credited with the view that anyone who omits it must go back and perform it; however, Abū Ḥanīfa, Thawrī and some others are reported to have said that while it is preferable to go back and perform *saʿy* if it has been omitted, it is also possible to compensate for it by sacrificing an animal. Ṭabarī, however, concludes that performing the *saʿy* is obligatory, and that the pilgrim who has omitted it must go back and do so, because traditions affirm that it was a practice of the Prophet, and he also rejects the variant readings of Ibn ʿAbbās and Ibn Masʿūd on the basis of ʿĀʾisha's tradition.⁷³ Qurtubī comments, as he commences his grammatical analysis of Q. 2:158, that he has already mentioned ʿĀʾisha's *taʾwīl* (interpretation),⁷⁴ thus presenting the view credited to her as exegesis in its own right.

Modes of Exegetical Authority

The six traditions discussed in this article present ʿĀʾisha exercising three general modes of exegetical authority. In these texts she appears variously as an active interlocutor, an exegete, and a participant in the early community's exegetical debates.

The first two traditions discussed present ʿĀʾisha questioning the Prophet, and even reminding him of a Qur'anic verse which would seem to conflict with his words. Thus they depict ʿĀʾisha as a transmitter who is indeed an 'active interlocutor'. In the first tradition, dealing with the Reckoning of the Day of Judgement, ʿĀʾisha's question would seem to reconcile the Qur'an and the Prophet's words, and hence to interpret both, and medieval exegetes appear to have generally accepted her tradition as an authoritative interpretation. In the second tradition, concerning the form of the Kaʿba, her question seems intended to clarify the degree to which the Prophet's words might have practical implications. Ibn al-Zubayr at least seems to have regarded this tradition as authoritative, to the extent that it could justify his controversial renovations in the face of the opposition of senior companions such as Ibn ʿAbbās.

With regard to portrayals of ʿĀʾisha as an exegete, it can be seen that the *Sūrat al-Najm* tradition cited above combines the exegetical method of *tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi'l-Qurʾān* with rhetorical effectiveness. The ʿArafa tradition, meanwhile, uses knowledge of pre-Islamic ritual practices as an interpretive means. One is left to infer that Muḥammad himself had told ʿĀʾisha about his visions, and had explained to her his reason for staying at ʿArafa, but neither tradition explicitly states this; instead, it is the voice of ʿĀʾisha-as-exegete that is in the foreground of both traditions. It is also interesting to note that in the case of the *Sūrat al-Najm* tradition, Bukhārī positions ʿĀʾisha as an authority on the nature of Muḥammad's visions by also citing four other traditions credited to her about the Prophet's first revelatory experience, which include a description of the encounter with Gabriel, in his chapter on exegesis.⁷⁵

Nonetheless, for a number of complex reasons the *Sūrat al-Najm* tradition is marginal or absent in some of the medieval exegetical works surveyed here. The impact of intricate theological ideas about God's attributes on the discussion is evident in some commentaries,⁷⁶ as is the concern with defining the excellence of Muḥammad in relation to the merits of previous prophets also claimed by other faith communities. Thus Nasāʾī relates a tradition credited to Ibn ʿAbbās that says that while Abraham was favoured with God's friendship and Moses by conversing with God, the Prophet Muḥammad was favoured with *ruʾya* (vision).⁷⁷ The popularity of this saying can be gauged from the fact that many exegetes cite it.⁷⁸ Mystical and theological concerns, the dynamics of interfaith polemic, and popular sentiment all played a role in how the tradition credited to ʿĀʾisha was received.

It would also seem that, in some cases at least, ʿĀʾisha's gender played a role in the debates surrounding the *Sūrat al-Najm* tradition. As this tradition, with its combination of Qur'an-based reasoning and rhetorical effectiveness, stood out as a convincing proof-text, it is not surprising that attempts would be made to undermine it by those who wished to argue in favour of the opposing interpretation. However, the reports credited to Ibn Masʿūd and others also arguably made less tempting targets because the tension between the representation of ʿĀʾisha as an exegete and the common view of women as intellectually deficient could be alluded to in order to undercut the authority of the tradition credited to her. The claim that Muḥammad spoke to her 'according to the level of her *ʿaql*' evokes the well-known tradition: '... I have not seen anyone more deficient in *ʿaql* and faith than you [women]. A wise and judicious man could be led astray by one of you ...'⁷⁹ The large number of traditions in circulation credited to other (male) companions such as Ibn Masʿūd and Abū Hurayra which also express the view that Muḥammad saw Gabriel rather than God enabled some medieval exegetes to support that interpretation with traditions without having to cite the report on the subject traced back to her.

While the *Sūrat al-Najm* tradition implies – but does not explicitly state – that ʿĀʾisha's interpretation is at variance with other influential exegeses, both the Prophets and Doubt and the *saʿy* traditions, given as examples of ʿĀʾisha as a participant in exegetical debates, explicitly situate her exegesis in the context of an exegetical debate. Traditions of this type are sufficiently numerous that a few medieval treatises were written on them.⁸⁰ In these traditions, the purveyors of an opposing interpretation are named, and their rationales summarised. As with the traditions in the previous section, while one can infer that Muḥammad had discussed the question of divine promises to prophets and the legal status of the *saʿy* with ʿĀʾisha, this is not made explicit. It is her vividly expressed interpretation that is in the textual foreground. It is also interesting to note that the successor ʿUrwa, well known as a person 'who rarely went beyond [ʿĀʾisha's] teaching, and judged according to it',⁸¹ appears in both traditions.

Exegetical treatment of the Prophets and Doubt tradition indicates that various attempts were made in the early centuries of Islam, both to bring the interpretations associated with ʿĀʾisha and Ibn ʿAbbās closer together, and to justify one at the expense of the other. Although, once the theological issue had been largely settled, the polyvalent readings of *kudhibū* were not generally seen as problematic and ʿĀʾisha's variant reading was not widely accepted, the theological reasoning behind the tradition credited to ʿĀʾisha is cited by a number of medieval exegetes. The interpretation of Q. 2:158 credited to ʿĀʾisha has a commanding presence in medieval exegetical debates about that verse surveyed in this article, both in relation to legal questions surrounding it and the variant readings attributed to Ibn Masʿūd and Ibn ʿAbbās.

‘Ā’isha could not control how her exegesis would later be depicted. This is also true of Ibn ‘Abbās,⁸² who is credited with interpretations ranging from the claim that the Prophet saw God ‘*fī aḥsan šūra* (in the most beautiful form)’,⁸³ to an explanation of the *greater revelation* [Q. 53:18] identical to Ibn Mas‘ūd’s.⁸⁴ Such divergent interpretations highlight Ibn ‘Abbās’ position as an authority for later interpreters, who often sought support for their views in traditions attributed to him. The contrast between the conflicting views ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbās and the relative stability of traditions traced back to ‘Ā’isha relating to the *Sūrat al-Najm*, the Prophets and Doubt, and the *sa‘y* traditions which are cited in the medieval exegetical works surveyed in this article is striking. The implications of this for her depiction in classical exegetical works require further study.

Conclusions

It is evident that – for Bukhārī – ‘transmission’ is not necessarily to be equated with passivity or instrumentality. All six traditions examined in this paper seem to make us hear ‘Ā’isha’s interpretive voice to varying extents, and her interpretations as portrayed in the *Sūrat al-Najm*, the Prophets and Doubt, and the *sa‘y* traditions are particularly vivid. She is depicted as questioning the Prophet about his words, and using several different interpretive strategies in her explanations of Qur’anic verses. She voices her interpretations in opposition to those offered by senior male companions, most notably Ibn ‘Abbās; her exegesis is also cited by her contemporaries as evidence for their points of view in their interpretive discussions. It is significant that Bukhārī depicts ‘Ā’isha pronouncing authoritatively on theological and ritual matters of central concern to Sunnī ‘orthodox’ belief.

Medieval Sunnī exegetes generally consider traditions credited to ‘Ā’isha as authoritative. For them, exegetical traditions traced back to her – even those in which her interpretive voice is in the foreground of the text – are acceptable proof-texts which can be used to help decide exegetical questions related to belief, ritual, and even the correct reading of some verses of the Qur’an. The medieval exegetical tradition presents traditions credited to ‘Ā’isha as exegetical evidence side by side with traditions traced back to senior male companions. In the Reckoning and the ‘Arafa traditions, the traditions credited to ‘Ā’isha agree with the generally accepted interpretation. Therefore, they are presented as uncontroversial evidence. The doubt and the *sa‘y* traditions address the controversial questions of whether prophets doubt, and the legal status of the Hajj ritual of going between Ṣafā and Marwa. ‘Ā’isha’s reported views on these two issues are, for the most part, accepted by medieval exegetes. The opinions traced back to ‘Ā’isha on these two questions play a role in the exegetical discourse through their use as proof-texts in debate, and as vivid expressions of the ‘orthodox’ majority opinion on these questions, once this had emerged.

The Kaʿba and *Sūrat al-Najm* traditions, however, address highly controversial issues. Ibn al-Zubayr reportedly justified his renovations of the Kaʿba on the basis of the tradition credited to ʿĀʾisha. However, the medieval exegetes surveyed who mention this tradition do not consider it an acceptable basis for action, as it was not in accordance with the ‘orthodox’ consensus. On the question of the Prophet’s visions, traditions traced back to ʿĀʾisha are cited by Ṭabarī, but are omitted by some later exegetes. But although her reported views on these two questions are often marginalised in the classical exegetical works referred in this study, they do not fade away altogether. As exegetical traditions which are deemed authentic, they continue to demand serious consideration from some exegetes.

These preliminary findings point not only to the existence of vivid depictions of ʿĀʾisha as an exegete in the *ḥadīth* literature, but also the interpretive weight which such traditions were generally considered to carry in some Sunnī commentaries. The degree to which such exegetical traditions may reflect a significant historical role played by ʿĀʾisha (and/or other women) in the origins and development of early Qurʾanic exegesis merits further research.

NOTES

* I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Sebastian Guenther (Toronto) for his valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

1 If repetitions are included, this becomes 64 out of a total of 501.

2 There is wide-ranging debate on the subject of *ḥadīth* authenticity. John Wansbrough regards all exegetical traditions as later retrojections. See *Qurʾanic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 179. Ignaz Goldziher doubts the authenticity of such texts credited to ʿĀʾisha and others. See I. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), pp. 106–7. Gregor Schoeler doubts that ʿĀʾisha was the original source of the account of Muḥammad’s first revelation, but suggests that reports related to the scandal involving her (*ḥadīth al-ifk*) do go back to her. See Gregor Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der Muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Muhammads* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), pp. 87–9; p. 153. Both reports appear in Bukhārī’s exegetical chapter. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (Arabic–English)*, tr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Dār al-Fikr, 1979), vol. 6, pp. 450ff, pp. 248ff (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*). Leila Ahmed regards the idea ‘that women’s words had weight, even concerning matters of spiritual and social import’ as a reflection of social conditions of Arabia immediately following Muḥammad’s death, but alien to the ʿAbbāsīd era (133–657/750–1258). See Leila Ahmad, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 72–3.

3 This expression was coined by Leila Ahmed to describe portrayals of early Muslim women. See Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 72.

4 For example, see Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qurʾan, Traditions and Interpretation* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 89, p. 101, p. 102, p. 170, n. 62. Bukhārī’s chapter on exegesis also cites a number of such traditions. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, pp. 247ff, pp. 292–3, pp. 295–6, pp. 300–2, p. 404.

- 5 Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, pp. 117–8. Exegesis of Q. 24:11–20 also articulated sectarian boundaries, as Shī'ī interpreters did not regard the verses as referring to 'Ā'isha. See D.A. Spellberg, art. "'Ā'isha bint Abī Bakr' in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), vol. 2, pp. 55–60.
- 6 Goldziher, *Die Richtungen*, p. 106.
- 7 Denise A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'Ā'isha bint Abī Bakr* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 53.
- 8 Ghassan Ascha, 'The "Mothers of the Believers": Stereotypes of the Prophet Muḥammad's Wives' in Ria Kloppenborg & Wouter J. Hanegraaff (eds), *Female Stereotypes in Religious Traditions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 94; Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, p. 106; cf. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, tr. Mary Jo Lakeland (Reading, Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1991), pp. 70ff.
- 9 Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, p. 117.
- 10 Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, p. 52.
- 11 Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 73.
- 12 Claude Gilliot points out that 'Ā'isha (as well as the companions Ibn 'Umar and Abū Hurayra) is credited with the transmission of many more exegetical traditions than six out of the ten companions whose names traditionally appear on lists of exegetes of the first generation found in Muslim sources. See Claude Gilliot, 'The Beginnings of Qur'ānic Exegesis' in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *The Qur'an: Formative Interpretation* (Aldershot & Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999), p. 8.
- 13 Majella Franzmann, *Women and Religion* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 49–50.
- 14 Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd also appear in the traditional lists of early exegetes which, however, do not contain any names of women. See C. Gilliot, art. 'Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval' in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 2, pp. 102–3. Some traditional Muslim accounts of early exegesis do mention 'Ā'isha, but as one who 'related traditions relevant to questions of *tafsīr*'. See Mujāhid Muḥammad al-Ṣawwāf, 'Early Tafsīr – A Survey of Qur'ānic Commentary up to 150 A.H.' in Khurshīd Aḥmad & Zafar Ishāq Ansārī (eds), *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Mawlānā Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1980), p. 140.
- 15 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, pp. 465–6 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*).
- 16 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, pp. 76–7 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*). Suyūṭī reports that Ibn 'Abbās related, concerning a particular verse, 'Gabriel brought it down to my cousin [*ibn 'ammī*], God's peace and blessings be upon him ...' See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī'l-tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr*, vol. 3, p. 29, in *Maktabat al-tafsīr wa-'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (compact disc, Jordan & Oman: Markaz al-Turāth, 1419/1999).
- 17 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, pp. 71–3 (*Bāb Fadā'il aṣḥāb al-nabī*). Ibn Mas'ūd was sent by 'Umar to Kūfa to teach and fill the post of *wazīr*. See Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa'l-mufasssīrūn* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1961), vol. 1, p. 118. It is interesting to note that all companions mentioned in traditional lists as exegetical authorities reportedly held political office and/or played officially sanctioned scholarly roles.
- 18 Bukhārī relates that the Prophet said, 'The one most beloved to me amongst you is the one who has the best character. Learn the Qur'an from four persons: 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd ...' See *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, p. 71 (*Bāb Fadā'il aṣḥāb al-nabī*). Ṭabarī relates that as 'Ā'isha lay dying, Ibn 'Abbās said to her: 'You were the most beloved of the wives of the Prophet, and the Messenger of God wouldn't love [anyone] except the good ...' See Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, p. 107, in *Maktabat al-tafsīr*.

19 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, p. 435 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*). In the interest of clarity, I have often slightly adjusted the translation.

20 'Narrated Ibn Abī Mulayka: 'Ā'isha, the wife of the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace), did not hear anything that she did not comprehend, except that she would ask [repeatedly] about it until she understood it. The Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) said, 'Whoever is called to account will be punished.' 'Ā'isha said, 'Doesn't Almighty God say: *He truly will receive an easy reckoning?*' She said, 'Then he [the Prophet] said, "That is the presentation [of accounts], but the one whose record is questioned will perish."' See Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1, p. 81 (*Kitāb al-'Ilm*).

21 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 8, p. 315, p. 350 (*Kitāb al-Raqā'iq*).

22 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 30, pp. 115–6.

23 Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 19, p. 272; Ismā'īl ibn 'Amr ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*, vol. 4, pp. 489–90; Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 8, pp. 456–7; all in *Maktabat al-tafsīr*.

24 Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 8, p. 457; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 490; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 30, p. 115.

25 Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 8, p. 457.

26 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, pp. 12–13 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*). The *ḥijr* is the space enclosed by a low, semi-circular wall on the north-west side of the Ka'ba.

27 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, pp. 382–3 (*Kitāb al-Hajj*).

28 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, pp. 383–4 (*Kitāb al-Hajj*); vol. 1, p. 95 (*Kitāb al-'Ilm*).

29 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 546–8.

30 Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, vol. 2, pp. 120–1; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 179–80; Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 1, pp. 308ff.

31 Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 1, p. 328. He relates that many earlier prophets also performed the Hajj [vol. 1, p. 313].

32 Interestingly, Ṭabarī does mention 'Ā'isha's tradition in his account of Ibn al-Zubayr's rebuilding of the Ka'ba in his *History*. The sub-narrator is Ibn al-Zubayr's mother (and 'Ā'isha's sister) Asmā' rather than Ibn 'Umar. See *The History of al-Ṭabarī: The Collapse of Sufyānid Authority and the Coming of the Marwānids*, tr. G.R. Hawting (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 176.

33 Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, vol. 2, p. 123; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 183.

34 Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, vol. 2, pp. 123–7; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 182–4.

35 Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, vol. 2, p. 125. As the 'Abbāsīd dynasty (750–1258) came to power by overthrowing the Umayyads, 'Abbāsīd renovations of the Ka'ba might have been perceived as politically motivated.

36 When the governor objects to Ibn al-Zubayr's rebuilding, he says that he does not believe that the latter had heard that *ḥadīth* from 'Ā'isha. Her veracity is never in question [Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 183]. G.H.A. Juynboll points out that speculations about the truthfulness of companions are rare in the *rijāl* literature. See *Muslim Traditions: Studies in Chronology, Provenance, and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 192.

37 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, p. 359 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*).

38 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*), pp. 360–1; *Tafsīr al-Nasā'ī*, ed. Ṣabrī ibn 'Abd al-Khālīq al-Shāfi'ī *et al* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna li'l-Baḥṭh al-'Ilmiyy, 1990), vol. 2, pp. 338–42.

39 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 27, pp. 48–52.

40 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī. *Kashf al-Mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sūfism*, tr. R.A. Nicholson (Karachi: Darul Ishaat, 1990), p. 331. Nonetheless, 'Ā'isha's alleged lack of insight does not prevent Hujwīrī from citing reports credited to her about the character of the Prophet, and the wearing of patched clothes [p. 42, p. 45].

41 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 253.

42 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 252; Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 7, p. 647.

43 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, p. 35 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*). 'Arafa is a plain about 21 km east of Mecca, where rites central to the pilgrimage are performed. See A.J. Wensinck [H.A.R. Gibb], art. 'Arafa' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, vol. 1, p. 604. Muzdalifa is a place roughly halfway between 'Arafa and Minā, and where pilgrims returning from 'Arafa spend the night. See F. Buhl, art. 'al-Muzdalifa' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, vol. 7, p. 825.

44 Efforts to standardise the performance of the pilgrimage are also evident in traditions about the ritual of *sa'y*, or going between the hills of Ṣafā and Marwa, which is discussed below.

45 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 291–3.

46 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 243.

47 Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 1, p. 545.

48 The 'both' refers to Ibn 'Abbās and his father, 'Abbās.

49 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, pp. 37–8 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*).

50 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, pp. 179–80 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*).

51 The significance of traditions about companion-codices and variant readings is a subject of debate. See John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 165ff; Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies* pp. 206ff; W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1977), p. 106; G.H. Stern, 'The First Women Converts in Early Islam', *Islamic Culture* 13:3 (July, 1939), pp. 304–5. This article considers this issue only in terms of the significance of such attributions in portrayals of 'Ā'isha's exegetical activity. The fact that Ibn Abī Dāwud states that among those who possessed their own copies of the Qur'an were the 'rightly guided' caliphs 'Umar and 'Alī, as well as Ibn Mas'ūd, and Ibn 'Abbās, and 'Ā'isha, suggests that in some cases, such attributions may depict exegetical authority. See 'Abdallah ibn Abī Dāwud al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, ed. Arthur Jeffery (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), pp. 50ff; pp. 83–4. Other sources assert that 'Ā'isha's copy of the Qur'an contained at least one of the variant readings attributed to her: see *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-sharḥ al-Imām Muḥyi'l-Dīn al-Nawawī*, ed. Khalīl Ma'mūn (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1994), vol. 5, pp. 131–2 (*Kitāb al-Salāt*); *Muwaṭṭa' al-Imām Mālik*, tr. Muhammad Rahimuddin (Beirut, 1985), p. 140 (*Kitāb al-Salāt*).

52 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, pp. 483–4 (*Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*).

53 For example, it is reported that the order of the suras in the copies of the Qur'an owned by Ibn Mas'ūd, 'Ubayy and Ibn 'Abbās differed among each other, and also from the 'Uthmānic recension. See Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), pp. 21–3, p. 115, pp. 193–4. Jeffery speculates that this tradition reported by Bukhārī does not refer to a pre-'Uthmānic codex of 'Ā'isha's, but rather to a copy of the 'Uthmānic codex which she had nonetheless decided to arrange 'in some sort of chronological order' [Jeffery, p. 231].

54 Nabia Abbott, *'Ā'ishah the Beloved of Mohammed* (London: Al-Saqi Books, 1985), p. 204. Jeffery's view is similar [Jeffery, p. 231]; cf. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 73.

55 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 13, pp. 82–8.

- 56 Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 9, pp. 275–6.
- 57 Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 4, pp. 595–6.
- 58 Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 4, p. 597, p. 667.
- 59 He is described as one who usually followed her interpretations. See ʿImād al-Dīn al-Hanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Quds, 1931), vol. 1, p. 62.
- 60 Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 4, p. 596; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 498. Alūsī (d. 669/1270) considers Ibn ʿAbbās' interpretation dubious, commenting that it does not accord with what is appropriate for prophets, 'as ʿĀʾisha said', and concludes that her recitation '*kudh-dhibū*' is the correct one. See Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, vol. 8, pp. 69, 81, in *Maktabat al-tafsīr*.
- 61 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, pp. 19–21 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*).
- 62 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, p. 21 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*).
- 63 Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1999), p. 667.
- 64 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, p. 118 (*Manāqib al-Anṣār*).
- 65 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, p. 374 (*Kitāb Aḥdāth al-anbiyāʾ*). Bukhārī relates that Abraham leaves Hagar in the valley with her infant son. When they run out of water, Hagar runs from Ṣafā and Marwa seven times, hoping to see someone from the heights, and the spring of Zamzam miraculously appears. See Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, pp. 373–5 (*Kitāb Aḥdāth al-anbiyāʾ*).
- 66 Cf. Burton, *The Collection of the Qurʾān*, p. 13.
- 67 It is interesting to note that the controversy over whether or not *saʿy* is obligatory has at least theoretical implications for gender relations, as *saʿy* involves both male and female pilgrims symbolically following the lead of a woman. Stowasser points out that Hagar is 'a most powerful figure' in Islamic tradition, in part because pilgrims retrace her steps. See Stowasser, *Women in the Qurʾān*, pp. 44, 49.
- 68 Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 49–50; Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, vol. 2, p. 25.
- 69 Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 49; Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 1, pp. 386–7.
- 70 Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, vol. 2, p. 25; Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 1, p. 387.
- 71 Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 49–50; Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 2, p. 178; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 199; Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 1, p. 384.
- 72 The *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, which is traced back to Mālik, cites the tradition credited to ʿĀʾisha on *saʿy* which is quoted above. Interestingly, it does not include any tradition on this subject which is ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās. See *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, pp. 351–2 (*Kitāb al-Ḥajj*).
- 73 Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 2, pp. 49–51.
- 74 Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 2, p. 182. Gilliot comments as follows: 'It has recently been definitively shown that the verb *taʾawwala*, from which the term *taʾwīl* is formed, originally meant "to apply a verse to a given situation", before it came to mean allegorical interpretation'. See C. Gilliot, art. 'Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval', p. 100.
- 75 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, pp. 450–3, pp. 453–4 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*). Suyūṭī cites a version of this, see *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 7, p. 644.
- 76 Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 17, p. 88; Bayḍawī, *Anwār*, vol. 5, p. 253.
- 77 Nasāʾī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 348.
- 78 Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 27, p. 48; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 251; Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-*

manthūr vol. 7, p. 647.

79 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, p. 313 (*Kitāb al-Zakāt*). One probable reason for Ibn Kathīr's emphatic defence of the tradition credited to 'Ā'isha is its use of the interpretive method of interpreting Qur'anic verses with the aid of others (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*), an approach that he regarded as the most sound type of exegesis. See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 'Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr' in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 56.

80 That is to say by Zarkashī (d. 795/1392) and Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505); see Spellberg, *Politics*, p. 56; cf. Abbott, *'Ā'ishah the Beloved*, p. 203; Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, pp. 77–8.

81 Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, vol. 1, p. 62.

82 Spellberg, *Politics*, p. 54; Goldziher, *Die Richtungen*, pp. 106–7. The debate concerning the significance of the numerous and often conflicting exegetical traditions ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās is summarised in C.H.M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), pp. 59ff.

83 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 251; Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 7, p. 647.

84 Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, vol. 17, p. 98, cf. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 6, p. 361 (*Kitāb al-Tafsīr*).

